

WHO CAN EXPLAIN THIS STRANGE MYSTERY?

"Old Sleuth," "Old Cap Collier," Chief of Detectives McClusky, Ex-Chief of Detectives O'Brien and Howard Fielding Write to the Journal Giving Their Theories of the Grave Robbery at Millville, N. J., Where Mrs. Phoebe Tilton's Body Was Removed, Stripped of Its Clothes, Dragged Through the Woods in a Soaking Rain, and Then Slashed Open and the Heart, Lungs and Stomach Taken Out.

SUMMARY OF ALL THE MYSTERIOUS FACTS AND STRANGE CIRCUMSTANCES SO FAR AS KNOWN UP TO DATE.

At midnight, Saturday, November 6, James Bell, a driver, was awakened by strange sounds that came from the little graveyard next door to his home at Millville, N. J., known as Mount Pleasant Cemetery. Peering out into the bright moonlight, he saw two black silhouetted figures apparently at work at one of the graves in the cemetery. At the same instant the two grewsome characters saw Bell, extinguished their lantern and disappeared.

The next day it was discovered that the grave of Mrs. Phoebe Tilton, who had died and been buried four months ago, had been torn open. The coffin had been smashed and the body was missing. By the aid of footprints and bits of the grave shroud the missing body was traced through a hole in the cemetery fence to a patch of woods not far away. Here the body was discovered, and with the discovery was revealed the fact that the feet of the dead woman was tied up by the same torn shroud, the fragments of which, with the footprints, had given the clue. And one of those footprints was a woman's.

The persons who had taken Mrs. Tilton's body, after dragging it to the spot where it was discovered, had divested it of all clothing. Then, evidently with an instrument which they knew how to use, they cut the body straight down the middle from the thorax to the pelvic bone, removing most of the internal organs. They were no bunglers, for the care and precision with which the task was accomplished evidenced a master hand. The breast bone and the front portion of the pelvic bone were cut asunder at their central lines. The heart was torn from its place and other internal organs removed.

And yet, in spite of all this detail, not a solitary clew could be found to indicate who was guilty of this frightful deed. There was nothing even to indicate a particular motive, and every line of investigation to discover something of this sort has failed utterly.

The day the body was discovered an ax stolen from the residence of James Sayres, who lives near the cemetery, was found standing in a log by the cemetery. There were indications of its having been used by the grave robbers, but no explanation can be given of its presence where it was found. It was also discovered that a week before the event workmen had noticed mysterious markings on a fence post which stood near Mrs. Tilton's grave. What these markings signified is a mystery. That they represented something is certain.

Mrs. Tilton's history was dramatic. She was one of the handsomest women in Millville. Years ago she left her husband and children, who adored her. She had been unfortunate ever since. Two years ago her distressing circumstances forced her to keep house for a man and his son, named Loder. She was taken sick there, but was found dying in the house of a neighbor named Lupker.

In spite of the best efforts of local authorities and the New York reporters the matter remains an unfathomable mystery. In view of the apparent and irreconcilable and unintelligible circumstances of the crime, the Journal has sought the best intelligence of Captain McClusky, Chief of Detectives of the New York Police; Stephen O'Brien, ex-Chief of Detectives, and also the imaginative and creative faculties of "Old Sleuth," the widely known detective of fiction; "Old Cap. Collier," the famous writer of detective stories, and "Howard Fielding," whose nervously intricate detective plots are famous.



CRIME COMMITTED TO HIDE A CRIME, SAYS CHIEF DETECTIVE M'CLUSKY.

THE crime stands out as one of the most horrible grave desecrations that the world has ever known.

Assuming that all of the attendant circumstances as to the finding of the opened grave, the broken coffin, and later the mutilated body are true in detail, the first clew that would appeal to me would be that of revenge and hatred.

When the name plate was torn from the coffin and sent to the husband, it must have been the work of a hand prompted by hatred or revenge.

Had the woman a lover after she was cast off by her family—was there any one so deeply attached to her that his passion so maddened him that nothing short of the mutilation of the remains of the object of his love could satisfy him?

Criminal history records many instances where to satisfy the trend of a mind perverted almost beyond the comprehension of more rational minds, acts were committed worse than this. Caesar, when Mary Martin's body lay cold in death, took his cleaver and gashed her side horribly. When I asked him why he did it, he replied: "Because I loved her so."

The Durrant case, in San Francisco, shows that, having murdered Blanche Langermont, Durrant, for the fiendish pleasure of cutting, cut and slashed his victims to satisfy the craving which dominated him.

This line prompts the idea that perhance the woman was beloved of some one whose mad desire to possess her heart, led him to commit the crime regardless of discovery.

The stealing of the stomach and other organs would lead to the suspicion that the woman might have died as the result of poison, and, when these murmurs had been voiced, mutilation was the only way to hide evidences of the first crime.

The woman's change of abode after she was taken ill, the fact that no physician was summoned to treat her; her acquaintances and the life she led, all prompt the idea of foul play—that she was one whose end would mean much to her last associates, but to her family, from whom she was estranged—all must be taken into consideration and thoroughly sifted.

The name plate was sent to the husband some time before the body was mutilated. Was this fact known before the last act of vandalism, and was an investigation made then?

Who had the woman removed during her last illness, and by whose orders? Somebody was interested in her movements—was it a relative whose desire for revenge could prompt such a desecration of the remains?

Setting aside for the moment the many theories which the printed details suggest, measure though they be, yet it would seem to me that a crime was committed to hide a crime; that the remains of the unfortunate woman were mutilated to hide a worse crime."

THEORY OF STEPHEN O'BRIEN EX-CHIEF OF DETECTIVES.

FROM the details of the grave robbery at Millville, which I have read only in the first reports as given in the Journal, it is not easy to form a theory regarding the deed; but as I see it now there is one very plausible theory which suggests itself to me.

It seems to have been the chief object of those who committed the crime to get possession of the organs of the body. It was very likely their first plan to take the body from the ground, cut out the organs, and then rebury the coffin and the mutilated corpse, trying to cover up all signs of their night's work so that no one might be the wiser. But this plan was spoiled by the appearance of James Bell upon his front veranda.

His knowledge of their presence in the graveyard made them fear discovery, so that, bound not to be cheated in the main thing for which they had come, the ghouls finished their work as quickly as possible, and in any manner, to obtain the heart and other organs.

The reason for wishing to get possession of these organs was most likely to subject them to chemical examination. It is possible that some friends or relatives of Mrs. Tilton became suspicious regarding the manner of her death; but, not caring to make their suspicions generally known, as they would have to in order to have the body exhumed and a post mortem examination made according to the forms of law, they took it upon themselves to make a private examination.

If the result of their examination showed proof to justify the suspicions they had held, they could resort to whatever means they wished to mete out justice to the one who had dealt foully with Mrs. Tilton. If their suspicions proved unfounded, no one would have suffered the taint which a widespread suspicion always gives.

This is, of course, a very haphazard theory. I am very busy as witness in the Thorn trial, and cannot give this mystery the time and thought it deserves for a treatment such as you wish. If I were on the scene of the crime and in touch with every detail my theory would perhaps seem very superficial, as, indeed, it must be from the little time I have been able to give to it. It is, however, the only theory which presents itself to me now.

Former Chief Detective Bureau New York Police.

THEFT OF THE ORGANS THE BEST CLEW, SAYS "OLD SLEUTH."

"OLD SLEUTH," the famous writer of detective stories, who is less well known as H. P. Halsey, had this to say of the Millville tragedy: "From the account of the grave robbery, which I read most hurriedly, I consider it one of the most mysterious crimes of many years."

"There are a half dozen motives which might be assigned for the deed, any one of which would very likely prove false upon investigation. To pick out the right motive would require more time and thought than I can possibly spare from my regular work. The theoretical solution of this most unusual problem is worth the most careful study, and I would want to bring my whole mind to bear upon it. In order to do this I should have to take myself entirely from the environment of my present duties, which I cannot afford to do."

"On the face of the matter it would seem that vengeance could not have been the motive for this fearful crime, and, further, it would seem that if a motive be found at all, the clew that will lead to it is the fact that the heart and some other organs of the body were carried away."

"OLD CAP. COLLIER" THINKS IT THE ACT OF A WOMAN.

IT is not an easy matter to attempt to formulate a theory in regard to the motive of the ghouls for desecrating the grave of Mrs. Phoebe Tilton, of Millville, N. J., from reading the newspaper reports, and without having made a personal investigation of the case.

There are many phases of this peculiar crime which have not been made clear in the reports and which a detective analyst would like to be conversant with before he ventured to express an opinion. I am familiar with the country round about Millville, and since reading the account of the woman's life and the description of the manner in which the crime was committed, and knowing something of the character of the people among whom she lived, several theories have been suggested to my mind, so that it would be somewhat reckless for me to say positively which one is correct, although I am inclined to think that the motive was revenge.

The attempt made to rob the grave six weeks ago, the wrenching off of the name plate from the coffin, the mauling of it to the husband of the woman, the horrible mangling of the body and the evident intention of the ghouls to leave it in a place where it would soon be discovered and a sensation created, impressed me with the fact that it was the work of some person or persons who desired to bring disgrace upon the woman's family, and in that way seek revenge for some imagined or real wrong the person who inspired and planned the crime considered had been committed against him or her by some member of the Tilton family.

It is stated that small footprints were found in the sand at the graveside, and this has led to the belief that one of the ghouls was a woman. The most horrible crimes have been committed and perpetrated by women. This crime displays peculiar fiendishness, and there are certain peculiarities about it which lead me to believe that a woman had a hand in it, and, perhaps, planned all the details.

A few years ago a crime resembling this in nearly all its phases was committed near Paris, France. Jacques Vibert, I think the man's name was, had been separated from his wife for a number of years. The woman, like Mrs. Tilton, sank lower and lower, until she became the associate of a gang of low ruffians. She died and was buried in the potter's field.

Jacques, after he had turned his wife out of doors, became infatuated with a young woman, and led her to believe that he would marry her as soon as his wife died. Before the death of Mme. Vibert, Jacques tired of his mistress; a violent quarrel occurred between the pair and they separated, the woman swearing that she would be revenged some time. After Mme. Vibert's body had been buried two months it was exhumed and mutilated, and certain parts were found missing when the body was discovered lying on the outside of the cemetery.

For a time the police were all at sea on the case, but at last they discovered that Vibert's mistress had planned and carried out the crime, with the assistance of a former lover.

If one of the ghouls was a woman, what motive could she have had in assisting in desecrating the grave and mutilating the body? Was it revenge? I am not sure. If I were working on the case I should make a careful search for that woman. I might be following a wrong trail, but nevertheless I should try and find out if any woman harbored a grudge against any member of the Tilton family.

The participants in the ghastly work must have been familiar with the neighborhood, and it would be well for the detectives to make careful inquiries in regard to the past life of the woman. Perhaps if they looked into that past and the past of all those who were at any time connected with her they would find the clew which would lead them to a solution of the mystery.

There is one incident in the case which is suspicious. The woman lived with a father and son named Loder. She was taken sick in the Loder house and young Loder took her to the neighboring house, occupied by a man and his wife named Lupker. In the Lupker home she died. Loder promised to go for a physician, but did not do so. Why did he remove her from his own place? Did he fear an investigation if the woman died there?

J. T. ALTEMUS ("OLD CAP. COLLIER").

Howard Fielding Thinks the Ghoul Is a Blackmailer.

THE body of Mrs. Phoebe Tilton was torn from its grave in the Millville (N. J.) cemetery early on the morning of Sunday, Nov. 7. It was shockingly mutilated, and some of the vital organs were removed. The details of the crime are set forth elsewhere on this page.

Outraged public sentiment demands to know who did it; but a question equally puzzling is this: Why was it done? The natural answer is that a frightened murderer thus removed the evidences of the crime. Let us suppose that her death involved a murder. What does the crime reveal concerning the criminal?

Mrs. Tilton seems to have died in bed. Next day a competent physician, examining the body, found no evidence of any but a natural death. Certainly there was no sign of violence.

If it was a crime it was shrewdly and successfully done. It had the quiet naturalness that distinguishes work of the true artist.

Let us turn to the next incident. Four months after Mrs. Tilton's death her body was rudely torn from the grave. The coffin lid was splintered by reckless blows. The corpse was roughly dragged out of the cemetery; the grave clothes were torn to tatters; the body was badly mutilated and certain of the internal organs were carried away. No attempt was made to hide the deed. The body was left where it lay when the ghastly work was done; the ax with which the mutilation had been in part accomplished was left sticking in a tree. Every detail was open, shameless, wilfully shocking.

Supposing still that Mrs. Tilton's death was a murder, can any one see the same hand in the two crimes? Could the person who managed her death so skillfully even have been an adviser in the later deed? Certainly not. He would have taken her from the grave, and no one in Millville would have known that she was gone.

Then the grave robbery was not done by a murderer fearful even of a buried secret. By whom was it done? Some say by one who suspected the murder, and took away the vital organs that he might search for evidences of poison. Examine that theory. What could such a person do with the evidence if he found it? Of what value would it be? Suppose he could produce to-day the bodily parts loaded with poison, would anybody believe he had not put it there? Could he even frighten any person in that way? Impossible.

This grave robbery has not destroyed evidence of guilt; it has destroyed evidence of innocence.

It has left the direct proof that Mrs. Tilton died a natural death upon the word of one man—the physician.

Yet it has proven to any trained and candid mind that the woman was not murdered. Put the grave robbery beside the murder, and the murder vanishes.

But the grave robbery has strengthened the position of any person who might have in his possession a bit of evidence which could be twisted into an instrument of blackmail or revenge, but would have been useless in the face of the testimony that the wretched corpse itself could have furnished.

The conclusion then would be that Mrs. Tilton died a natural death; that her grave was robbed by one who wished to use some bit of information—probably worthless—to revenge himself upon a person who had been interested in the unhappy woman, and might pay a small sum to have her wretched memory pass from the minds of men.

The only criminals in this case, then, are those who robbed the grave. Who were they? The tracks in the soft earth reveal a strong, heavily built man, who went about his grim work ruthlessly; and a companion, small, light, nervous, afraid to touch the body after it had been ripped from its coffin.

The body was dragged, not lifted, though there were two at the grave. The light steps ran timidly along beside the heavy tread. A woman, perhaps.

Let the authorities look for a man and a woman. The man may have some slight medical knowledge, though a butcher could have done the work as well. It required rather brutality than skill. Those people should be sought near the scene of the crime, but among those who best knew Mrs. Tilton's early history, and the characters and circumstances of those to whom her conduct had brought grief and shame.

The fact that no one of Mrs. Tilton's relatives is able to pay a large sum does not affect the theory of blackmail in the mind of an experienced person. Any one who would do such a deed at all would do it for a hundred dollars—or half that.